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Walter, Frank; Lam, Catherine K.; van der Vegt, Geert; Huang, X.; Miao, Q.

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Abusive Supervision and Subordinate Performance: Instrumentality Considerations in the Emergence and Consequences of Abusive Supervision

Frank Walter
Justus Liebig University Giessen

Catherine K. Lam
City University of Hong Kong

Gerben S. van der Vegt
University of Groningen

Xu Huang
Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Qing Miao
Zhejiang University

Drawing from moral exclusion theory, this article examines outcome dependence and interpersonal liking as key boundary conditions for the linkage between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision. Moreover, it investigates the role of abusive supervision for subordinates' subsequent, objective work performance. Across 2 independent studies, an experimental scenario study ($N = 157$; Study 1) and a time-lagged field study ($N = 169$; Study 2), the negative relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision was found to hinge on a supervisor's outcome dependence on subordinates but not on a supervisor's liking of subordinates. Furthermore, Study 2 demonstrated (a) a negative association between abusive supervision and subordinates' subsequent objective performance and (b) a conditional indirect effect of perceived performance on subsequent objective performance, through abusive supervision, contingent on the degree of outcome dependence, although these relationships did not reach conventional significance levels when controlling for prior objective performance. All in all, the findings highlight the role of instrumentality considerations in relation to abusive supervision and promote new knowledge on both origins and consequences of such supervisory behavior.

Keywords: abusive supervision, subordinate performance, outcome dependence, liking

Recent years have seen an explosion of research on abusive supervision, defined as supervisors' "sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors [toward subordinates], excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Scholars have estimated that abusive supervision affects more than 13% of the U.S. workforce (Tepper, 2007), and numerous studies have shown that such behavior imposes severe psychological costs on subordinates, including reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and well-being as well as increased psychological distress (for recent reviews, see Martinko, Harvey,

Brees, & Mackey, 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Consequently, it is not surprising that researchers have been striving to better understand *why* supervisors engage in abusive behavior. Much of this work has conceptualized abusive supervision as a form of displaced aggression that occurs more frequently if supervisors experience abusive behavior themselves (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012) and suffer from organizational injustice (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006) or coworker conflicts (Harris, Harvey, & Kacmar, 2011).

Although this research has created important insights, the depiction of abusive supervision in this line of inquiry remains incomplete, with abusive supervision being portrayed as a type of *noninstrumental* hostility "that is directed against convenient and innocent targets when retaliation against the source of one's frustration is not possible or feasible" (Tepper, 2007, p. 269). To provide a wider, more balanced perspective, theorists have called for attention to the potential role of strategic aspects in the etiology of abusive supervision (Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007). In particular, supervisors may believe they can use abusive behavior "to elicit high performance [from subordinates] or to send the message that mistakes will not be tolerated" (Tepper, 2007, p. 265). Abusive supervision may occur, thus, as an *instrumental*

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Frank Walter, Department of Organization and Human Resource Management, Justus Liebig University Giessen; Catherine K. Lam, Department of Management, City University of Hong Kong; Gerben S. van der Vegt, Department of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior, University of Groningen; Xu Huang, Department of Management & Marketing, Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Qing Miao, School of Public Affairs, Zhejiang University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Frank Walter, Department of Organization and Human Resource Management, Justus Liebig University Giessen, Licher Straße 62, 35394 Gießen, Germany. E-mail: frank.walter@wirtschaft.uni-giessen.de

reaction toward subordinates perceived as low performers (Ashforth, 1997; Kräkel, 1997).

Moral exclusion theory has proven particularly useful for explicating the latter notion (Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011). This theory highlights the role of utility considerations for individuals' hostile acts (Opatow, 1990). It suggests that concerns of justice and morality do not apply for targets perceived as detrimental for an actor (Leets, 2001; Opatow, 1995), such that harmful and hostile behavior occurs more frequently toward targets exhibiting low rather than high utility (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Opatow, 1990). On the basis of this reasoning, Tepper et al. (2011) have theorized that subordinates perceived as low performers exhibit less utility for their supervisors and, accordingly, have empirically demonstrated a negative association between perceived subordinate performance and supervisor abuse.¹ This moral exclusion approach complements our knowledge by illustrating that abusive supervision can have a strategic, instrumental side (e.g., as an attempt to punish underachievers; Ferris et al., 2007; Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). Nevertheless, this perspective is in an early developmental stage, and important questions remain to be addressed.

First, the linkage between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision may be more complex than the existing literature suggests. A subordinate's utility for his or her supervisor may not only depend on the subordinate's perceived performance, in particular, but also on the degree to which such performance actually matters for a supervisor's own goal attainment (cf. Wage-man, 1999). Accordingly, a supervisor's outcome dependence on a subordinate (i.e., the extent to which a subordinate's contributions influence a supervisor's outcomes; Deutsch, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1989) may be a key moderating factor that shapes a supervisor's abusive reactions toward perceived subordinate performance. Further, theorists have emphasized that personal relationships influence processes of moral exclusion (Brockner, 1990; Singer, 1998). In particular, positive interpersonal feelings (e.g., liking) can create a sense of moral obligation (Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Cropanzano & Stein, 2009). Hence, supervisors may refrain from hostile behavior toward well-liked subordinates, even if such subordinates exhibit low utility (cf. Singer, 1998). Building on this theoretical backdrop, we cast a supervisor's outcome dependence on and liking of a subordinate as critical, heretofore unexamined boundary conditions that qualify the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision.

Second, although supervisors may try to use abusive behavior in an instrumental manner (Ferris et al., 2007; Kräkel, 1997), the overwhelming majority of the research on abusive supervision has illustrated its negative relationships with subordinates' performance (Martinko et al., 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007). This literature depicts abusive supervision as dysfunctional and destructive (Krasikova et al., 2013) rather than as a means to enforce better performance among underachievers. At the same time, the available evidence is inconclusive, because this research has almost exclusively (a) drawn on supervisory performance perceptions and (b) used cross-sectional survey designs to examine such perceptions both as antecedents and as consequences of abusive supervision (e.g., Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007; Tepper et al., 2011).² Clearly, supervisory performance ratings are theoretically and practically important, and cross-sectional designs represent a valuable step toward unraveling complex relations in field settings. Meta-analytic research has shown, however, that

supervisor-rated and objective performance measures are not interchangeable (Bommer, Johnson, Rich, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 1995), and cross-sectional survey studies do not allow for causal conclusions (De Vaus, 2001). Hence, uncertainty remains about whether the negative role of abusive supervision will generalize to objective subordinate performance and about the direction of causality in abusive supervision–performance linkages (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007). Scholars have, accordingly, called for research that examines whether leaders' abusive behavior “is related not only to ‘soft’ criteria but also to ‘hard’ performance data” (Schyns & Schilling, 2013, p. 150) and that enables stronger directional inference (Martinko et al., 2013).

The present investigation used two independent studies to address these issues. In Study 1, we used an experimental scenario design to shed new light on the role of perceived subordinate performance as an antecedent of abusive supervision and to examine the moderating roles of outcome dependence and liking. In Study 2, we drew on a time-lagged field study to constructively replicate Study 1's findings and investigate the linkage between abusive supervision and individual subordinates' subsequent, objective work performance. Hence, Study 2 moved beyond the first study by examining an integrative conceptual model in which supervisors' abusive behavior links their subjective performance perceptions with subordinates' objective performance outcomes (contingent on the degree of outcome dependence and liking; see Figure 1).

Taken together, the present studies aim to increase our understanding of instrumentality considerations both in the emergence and in the consequences of abusive supervision. Beyond reiterating the potential role of supervisory performance perceptions as an antecedent of abusive supervision (cf. Tepper et al., 2011), we strive to more solidly anchor this association within the supervisor–subordinate relation in which it occurs, illustrating how key features of such relations (i.e., outcome dependence and liking) can account for differences in a supervisor's abusive reactions. In addition, this research is among the first to examine the role of abusive supervision for subordinates' objective work performance. It thus examines whether an instrumental view of abusive supervision (i.e., as a strategic tool to address perceived underperformers) is justified or whether such supervisory behavior may backfire to damage a subordinate's “hard” performance outcomes.

¹ Scholars have conceptualized job performance as a multidimensional phenomenon that, besides task (or in-role) performance, comprises contextual (or extra-role) and counterproductive (or deviance) dimensions (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). Consistent with Tepper et al. (2011; see also Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007), this research focuses on subordinates' *task performance*, defined as behaviors that directly “contribute to the production of a good or the provision of a service” (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002, p. 67).

² As an exception, Detert, Treviño, Burris, and Andiappan (2007) examined abusive supervision's objective performance outcomes. This study was located at the business-unit level of analysis, however, and therefore does not allow for clear-cut conclusions about individual performance. Moreover, Lian, Ferris, Morrison, and Brown (2014) investigated cross-lagged relationships between abusive supervision and subordinates' self-rated organizational deviance. This study exclusively focused on counterproductive performance dimensions, however, and did not examine subordinates' objective task performance.

Figure 1. Integrative conceptual model.

Perceived Performance and Abusive Supervision

A Moral Exclusion Perspective

Moral exclusion theory suggests that people have a specified “scope of justice” that reflects a psychological boundary within which considerations of justice and fairness are relevant for guiding their actions (Opotow, 1995, p. 347). Target individuals included within one’s scope of justice are perceived as deserving of fair and respectful treatment; in contrast, considerations of fairness, respect, and morality do not apply for targets excluded from one’s scope of justice (i.e., targets suffering from moral exclusion). Consequently, individuals from the latter group “are vulnerable to harmful treatment” (Hafer & Olson, 2003, p. 312); engaging in hostile, aggressive, and immoral behavior toward these individuals “appears acceptable, appropriate, or just” (Opotow, 1990, p. 1). Further, moral exclusion research has shown that one important factor influencing whether a target is placed inside or outside an actor’s scope of justice is the target’s utility for the actor (i.e., the degree to which the target is perceived as beneficial or harmful for the actor’s goals and self-interest; Hafer & Olson, 2003; Leets, 2001; Opotow, 1990, 1995). Targets perceived as useful for an actor’s goal attainment are likely to be included in the actor’s scope of justice, whereas targets perceived as not useful or even deleterious are likely to be placed outside the actor’s scope of justice and, therefore, to suffer from moral exclusion and the associated negative, hostile behaviors to a greater extent.

Applying this logic to supervisor–subordinate interactions, *Tepper et al. (2011)* argued that a subordinate’s utility for a supervisor hinges on supervisory perceptions of subordinate performance. High-performing subordinates, on the one hand, may be instrumental for their supervisor’s goal attainment. Hence, their perceived utility may shield them from abusive supervision. Low-performing subordinates, on the other hand, are likely to harm their supervisor’s goal attainment; these subordinates “are more likely to make supervisors look bad, interfere with their capacity to accomplish their work, and take up more of their time addressing the fallout poor performance causes” (*Tepper et al., 2011*, p. 282). Thus, subordinates perceived as underperforming should fall outside of their supervisors’ scope of justice and, therefore, be more likely to become victims of their supervisors’ abusive practices.

Tepper et al. (2011) found support for this prediction in a field study among 183 supervisor–subordinate dyads.

Importantly, however, research further suggests that an actor’s working and personal relationships with a target may critically influence the role of utility considerations and, thus, may alter processes of moral exclusion (e.g., *Brockner, 1990; Singer, 1998*). Hence, we propose that such aspects can shape the relevance of perceived subordinate performance (and the associated utility judgments) for a subordinate’s placement inside or outside of a supervisor’s scope of justice. Rather than assuming a uniformly negative association, we therefore argue that key features of the supervisor–subordinate relationship may qualify the role of supervisory performance perceptions for the abusive behavior supervisors direct toward individual subordinates.

Moderating Role of Outcome Dependence

An important factor that determines the utility of a subordinate’s perceived performance for his or her supervisor is the degree to which this performance is, in fact, relevant for a supervisor’s own goals and outcomes (i.e., outcome dependence; *Deutsch, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1989*). Such patterns of interpersonal dependency strongly shape individuals’ “perceptions that they need one another in order to perform effectively” (*Wageman, 1999*, p. 210). On this basis, we propose that a supervisor’s outcome dependence on a subordinate will moderate the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision.

Supervisors’ outcome dependence is particularly strong if supervisors and subordinates share concrete tasks and objectives (*Tjosvold, 1989*). In such situations, the potential utility of subordinates’ performance will be pronounced, because the supervisor’s rewards, recognition, and goal attainment are highly contingent on subordinates’ contributions (*Ilgen, Mitchell, & Fredrickson, 1981; Moss & Martinko, 1998; Van der Vegt & Van de Vliert, 2002*). As a consequence, subordinates’ perceived performance is likely to activate mechanisms of moral exclusion or inclusion (cf. *Tepper et al., 2011*). If a subordinate is perceived as performing well, the supervisor will directly benefit from the subordinate’s contributions (viz., positive utility). Thus, the supervisor is likely to include the subordinate within his or her scope of justice and perceive the subordinate as deserving of fair treatment (*Hafer & Olson, 2003*;

Opotow, 1990, 1995). Logically, then, the supervisor is less likely to exhibit abusive behavior toward that subordinate. If a subordinate's performance is perceived as inferior, however, the supervisor's own goal attainment is hindered, and his or her outcomes will suffer (viz., negative utility). As a consequence, the subordinate may fall outside the supervisor's scope of justice, putting him or her at an increased risk of becoming a target of abusive behavior (Opotow, 1990). This reasoning is consistent with theorists' suggestion that hostile supervisory behaviors are particularly likely if a supervisor's own goal attainment "is thwarted by followers' performing in unacceptable ways" (Krasikova et al., 2013, p. 1317). With relatively high outcome dependence, supervisors may consider abusive acts toward low-performing subordinates as a justified and instrumental form of punishment in an attempt to stimulate greater subordinate effort and performance (Ferris et al., 2007; Kräkel, 1997). Consequently, we expect a strong negative linkage between a subordinate's perceived performance and abusive supervision under such conditions.

When supervisors' outcome dependence on subordinates is weaker, supervisors' goal attainment hinges on subordinates' contributions to a lesser extent, and their rewards are less strongly coupled with subordinates' performance (Tjosvold, 1989). In such situations, subordinates' perceived performance is, by definition, of limited potential utility for a supervisor (Moss & Martinko, 1998; Van der Vegt & Van de Vliert, 2002). When outcome dependence is relatively low, supervisors will derive less tangible benefits from high-performing subordinates and will suffer little significant liabilities from low performers. Largely irrespective of a subordinate's perceived performance, then, he or she is unlikely to make a salient contribution to the supervisor's goal achievement, and the subordinate's utility for the supervisor should therefore remain limited. As a consequence, we anticipate that the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision will be weakened when a supervisor's outcome dependence on a subordinate is relatively low. Taken together, we propose the following interaction:

Hypothesis 1: Supervisors' outcome dependence moderates the negative relationship between supervisor perceptions of subordinate performance and abusive supervision, such that this relationship is stronger under conditions of higher rather than lower outcome dependence.

Moderating Role of Interpersonal Liking

Moreover, we cast a supervisor's liking of a subordinate as a key moderating factor that may outweigh utility considerations and, thus, may diminish the role of perceived subordinate performance for abusive supervision. Moral exclusion researchers have conceptualized liking as a key aspect of the personal relationship between an actor and a target that shapes the target's positioning inside or outside of the actor's scope of justice (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Singer, 1998). Similarly, scholars have shown that psychological proximity and interpersonal identification can induce a strong sense of moral obligation that influences processes of moral exclusion (Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Cropanzano & Stein, 2009; Opatow, 1990). Building on this logic, we anticipate that higher interpersonal liking will buffer the negative association between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision.

Given the sense of moral obligation associated with high-quality interpersonal relationships (Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Singer, 1998), we expect that utility considerations will be less relevant for guiding a supervisor's abusive behavior toward a well-liked subordinate. Even to the extent that such a subordinate is perceived as a low performer and, thus, may exhibit low utility (cf. Tepper et al., 2011), the supervisor should nevertheless view abusive acts as violating the moral standards inherent to the respective supervisor-subordinate relation and should perceive the subordinate as deserving of fair treatment (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Opatow, 1990). In other words, the supervisor's scope of justice should encompass the respective subordinate, despite potential utility problems caused by the subordinate's poor performance (cf. Singer, 1998). As such, we expect that supervisors will restrain their abusive tendencies, even toward perceived low performers, under conditions of relatively high liking.

Such constraints should not apply, however, with regard to disliked subordinates. With high perceived performance, these subordinates are likely to remain within their supervisor's scope of justice because of their potential utility (Tepper et al., 2011). With low perceived performance, in contrast, negative utility judgments should be highly relevant and trigger processes of moral exclusion toward disliked subordinates (cf. Opatow, 1995). Abusive supervision is likely, then, because supervisors will feel little moral obligation to withhold such behavior. In fact, research has shown that supervisors tend to attribute disliked subordinates' low performance to internal factors (e.g., lack of motivation and effort; Avison, 1980; Heneman, Greenberger, & Anonyuo, 1989), rendering it likely that such employees will be perceived as deserving of abusive acts to punish and possibly correct their dysfunctional behavior (cf. Hafer & Olson, 2003; Krasikova et al., 2013). All in all, we therefore anticipate the following interaction pattern:

Hypothesis 2: Supervisors' liking moderates the negative relationship between supervisor perceptions of subordinate performance and abusive supervision, such that this relationship is stronger under conditions of lower rather than higher liking.

Taken together, our hypotheses on the antecedents of abusive supervision suggest that both supervisors' outcome dependence and interpersonal liking serve as important boundary conditions that qualify the role of perceived subordinate performance. One may wonder, on this basis, about the possibility of three-way interactive associations. With supervisors' liking potentially creating a sense of moral obligation and shaping their interpretation of subordinates' actions (cf. Opatow, 1990; Singer, 1998), for example, the interactive role of perceived performance and outcome dependence may be buffered for well-liked subordinates. Given the present state of theory and research, however, we believe it would be premature to develop formal hypotheses on the specific shape of such intricate relationships. Hence, we examine possible three-way interactions in an exploratory manner.

Study 1: Method, Results, and Discussion

Participants and Procedure

Study 1 used an experimental design to investigate perceived subordinate performance as an antecedent of abusive supervision

and test the moderating roles of outcome dependence and liking (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Participants were 164 Dutch undergraduate business students enrolled at a large university in the Netherlands who volunteered for the study. Seven participants were excluded because they indicated that their English reading ability was problematic (i.e., lower than 4 on a scale from 1 [*very poor*] to 7 [*very good*]); results remained virtually unchanged when including these individuals. Of the remaining 157 participants, 54% were male and 46% female; their mean age was 22 years ($SD = 1.77$).

In line with previous experimental research on aggression in general (e.g., DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2007) and hostile supervisor behavior in particular (e.g., Kim, Rosen, & Lee, 2009), we used a scenario procedure to manipulate the independent variables. We randomly assigned the participants to one out of eight conditions in a 2 (perceived subordinate performance: lower vs. higher) $\times$ 2 (outcome dependence: lower vs. higher) $\times$ 2 (liking: lower vs. higher) between-subjects design. Participants received all study materials in paper-and-pencil form. They were told that they were to participate in a study on supervisor–subordinate interactions that required them to read a brief, hypothetical scenario, place themselves into the role of the supervisor described, and then answer a number of questions with regard to the scenario. Participation was voluntary, and it was possible to terminate participation at any time.

The basic scenario description (adapted from Meeker & Elliott, 1987) was identical across experimental conditions. We asked the participants to imagine that they were the leader of a company work team whose job was to conduct market research projects. One of the subordinates working within the team was tasked with interviewing at least 150 people before the end of the week for market research purposes. This situation was subsequently used to manipulate the independent variables, as outlined in the following. After reading the full scenario, participants evaluated their likelihood of engaging in a number of abusive behaviors toward the subordinate described. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Manipulations and Measures

Perceived subordinate performance. Participants were presented with a higher or lower performing subordinate to manipulate their perceptions of subordinate performance. In the lower performance condition, participants read that the subordinate had only interviewed 109 people (of 150 targeted interviewees) by the end of the week and was “not at all ready to report any findings.” Participants in the higher performance condition read that the subordinate had contacted 160 people and had even compiled a preliminary report that highlighted his most important results.

Outcome dependence. Building on manipulations described by Turban, Jones, and Rozelle (1990), participants in the lower outcome dependence condition read that supervisors in their company were rewarded on the basis of their individual performance, and it was emphasized that supervisors’ compensation therefore depended on their *own* performance to a large extent. Participants in the higher outcome dependence condition read that supervisors were rewarded based on the total performance of both themselves and their subordinates. It was emphasized that supervisors’ individual compensation therefore depended both on how well they and on how well their subordinates performed.

Interpersonal liking. To manipulate interpersonal liking, the subordinate in the scenario was depicted as more or less likable, drawing from procedures described by Cardy and Dobbins (1986) and Dobbins and Russell (1986). Participants in the lower liking condition read that the subordinate was “very dislikable” and that his coworkers described him as “conceited and rude, a superficial and discourteous person.” Participants in the higher liking condition read that the subordinate was “very likable” and that his coworkers described him as “happy and humorous, an interesting and cheerful person.”

Abusive supervision. We asked the participants to indicate their likelihood of engaging in 12 behaviors from *Tepper’s* (2000) abusive supervision measure toward the subordinate described in the scenario (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*). These items were slightly adapted to allow for self-ratings. Sample items include “Be rude to him,” “Ridicule him,” “Tell him he’s incompetent,” and “Make negative comments about him to others.” Three items from *Tepper* (2000) were not included in the survey (i.e., “Invade his privacy,” “Break promises,” and “Lie to him”), because these items were deemed inapplicable in the context of a scenario that covers a single event rather than a longer term relationship between supervisor and subordinate. Internal consistency reliability for the abusive supervision measure was .85.³

Results of Study 1

Manipulation checks. After having completed the abusive supervision measure, participants were asked to indicate how well the subordinate in the scenario performed (1 = *very badly*, 7 = *very well*), how dependent their own rewards were on their subordinates’ performance (1 = *very independent*, 7 = *very dependent*), and how likable the subordinate was (1 = *very dislikable*, 7 = *very likable*). Results indicated that the subordinate was perceived as performing better in the higher performance condition ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.46$) than in the lower performance condition ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.00$; $p < .001$). Hence, we were successful in manipulating participants’ perceptions of subordinate performance. Similarly, participants viewed themselves as more dependent on their subordinates’ performance in the higher outcome dependence ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.04$) than in the lower outcome dependence condition ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.12$; $p < .05$), and the subordinate was seen as more likable in the higher interpersonal liking ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.16$) than in the lower interpersonal liking condition ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.16$; $p < .001$).⁴

Hypothesis testing. We used a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analysis of variance to examine the moderating roles of outcome dependence and liking for the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision. As depicted in *Table 1*, results yielded a significant main effect for liking, with abusive supervision being more pronounced toward dislikable ($M = 2.72$, $SD = .82$) rather than likable subordinates ($M = 2.42$, $SD = .84$; $p < .05$). Further,

³ We note that *Tepper’s* (2000) full 15-item scale was used in Study 2. In the Study 2 dataset, the correlation between the 12-item measure used in Study 1 and the full measure was .98 ($p < .001$).

⁴ An anonymous reviewer noted that, although the difference between conditions was statistically significant, these results show that participants in the lower outcome dependence condition perceived moderate (rather than very low or even negative) outcome dependence. Related issues are further addressed in the General Discussion section.

Table 1
Analysis of Variance Results for Abusive Supervision (Study 1)

Variable	<i>F</i>	η^2
Perceived performance	20.95***	.12
Outcome dependence	1.87	.01
Liking	5.55*	.04
Perceived Performance $\times$ Outcome Dependence	4.90*	.03
Perceived Performance $\times$ Liking	0.03	.00
Outcome Dependence $\times$ Liking	2.28	.02
Perceived Performance $\times$ Outcome Dependence $\times$ Liking	0.16	.00

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

there was a significant main effect for perceived subordinate performance; abusive supervision was more pronounced in the lower subordinate performance condition ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .82$) than in the higher subordinate performance condition ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .77$; $p < .001$). As predicted in Hypothesis 1, this latter main effect was qualified by a significant Performance $\times$ Outcome Dependence interaction ($p < .05$). In contrast, the predicted Performance $\times$ Liking interaction was not significant. Hence, Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

The pattern of the significant Performance $\times$ Outcome Dependence interaction is depicted in Figure 2. As shown, there was a significant simple effect of perceived subordinate performance under conditions of higher outcome dependence, with abusive supervision being more pronounced in the lower ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .88$) rather than higher subordinate performance condition ($M = 2.08$, $SD = .70$; $p < .001$). With lower outcome dependence, in contrast, the simple effect of perceived subordinate performance on abusive supervision was not significant (lower performance condition: $M = 2.81$, $SD = .75$; higher performance condition: $M = 2.52$, $SD = .79$ [*ns*]). Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported. As further depicted in Table 1, the three-way interaction of perceived subordinate performance, outcome dependence, and liking was not significant. We note that the results remained virtually identical when omitting this interaction term and only incorporating the hypothesized interactions.

Figure 2. Interactive relationship of perceived subordinate performance and outcome dependence with abusive supervision in Study 1.

Discussion of Study 1 Findings

In support of Hypothesis 1, the present study demonstrated that perceived subordinate performance was negatively associated with abusive supervision under conditions of higher but not under conditions of lower outcome dependence. We did not find support for Hypothesis 2, however; despite a significant main effect, liking did not moderate the perceived performance–abusive supervision linkage.

Interpretation of these results is bound by several limitations. On the one hand, the experimental nature of Study 1 underscores the viability of using perceived subordinate performance as an antecedent variable in abusive supervision research. On the other hand, questions about external validity may arise because we captured participants' self-rated likelihood of engaging in abusive supervision (rather than actual behavior) and because we used a student sample in a hypothetical scenario design. It is possible, for example, that study participants in the higher liking condition did not develop the strong sense of interpersonal liking that underlies our argumentation for Hypothesis 2—potentially explaining the non-significant results for this predicted interaction. Although scholars have emphasized the utility of an experimental scenario approach as an initial step in establishing causal relations (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; De Cremer, 2006; Kim et al., 2009), further evidence from more naturalistic settings is needed to provide greater confidence in our findings' robustness and viability.

Moreover, as in previous work (e.g., Ilgen et al., 1981; Moss & Martinko, 1998), Study 1 operationalized outcome dependence at the supervisor/team level. Research has shown, however, that not all members of a work team are equally relevant for the team's performance. Hence, a supervisor's outcomes, rewards, and goal attainment may hinge on some subordinates' contributions to a greater extent than on others' (e.g., because of differences in individual subordinates' positioning in the team's work flow, task-related abilities, experiences, or social skills; Anderson & Brion, 2014; Humphrey, Morgeson, & Mannor, 2009). Because harmful work behavior, to a large part, occurs at the dyadic level (Lam, Van der Vegt, Walter, & Huang, 2011), it is important to consider this issue when examining abusive supervision.

And finally, Study 1 focused on perceived subordinate performance, outcome dependence, and liking as antecedents of supervisor abuse. As outlined earlier, however, a thorough understanding of instrumentality considerations in relation to abusive supervision also requires examination of the objective performance consequences of such behavior, highlighting whether abu-

sive supervision represents a potentially useful reaction toward perceived underperformers. Clearly, Study 1 cannot speak to this important question.

We address these issues in the remainder of this article. In particular, we conducted a second study to constructively replicate Study 1's findings in a naturalistic field setting, conceptualizing supervisors' outcome dependence as a dyadic phenomenon that can differ between individual subordinates. Further, Study 2 extended beyond the relationships examined in Study 1 by developing and testing hypotheses on the role of abusive supervision for subordinates' subsequent, objective work performance. Consequently, Study 2 examined a more comprehensive conceptual model that incorporates instrumentality considerations with regard to both the development and the implications of abusive supervision.

Instrumentality of Abusive Supervision: An Integrative Model

Abusive Supervision and Subordinates' Subsequent Objective Work Performance

Possible supervisory beliefs about abusive supervision's instrumentality notwithstanding (cf. Ferris et al., 2007; Kräkel, 1997), existing theory and research suggest such behavior to negatively associate with subordinates' performance outcomes (Harris et al., 2007; Tepper, 2007). On the basis of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), for example, scholars have argued that employees repay in kind the negative treatment they receive from organizational authorities; in particular, "subordinates may repay an abusive supervisor by decreasing their job performance" (Harris et al., 2007, p. 253). Moreover, research has shown that abusive supervision depletes important resources needed for effective job performance, diminishing subordinates' self-efficacy and job attitudes, contributing to their emotional exhaustion, and deflecting their efforts away from core job tasks and toward coping with continuous threats of supervisor abuse (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Tepper, 2007).

Accordingly, empirical studies have typically found significant associations between abusive supervision and various dimensions of subordinate performance, including negative relationships with individual subordinates' task performance (Harris et al., 2007) and organizational citizenship behavior (Aryee et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2011; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002) and positive relationships with organizational deviance (Lian et al., 2014). As noted before, however, this research has almost exclusively drawn on supervisory perceptions (or self-ratings) to capture subordinate performance and has used cross-sectional designs (with the exception of Lian et al., 2014). Alternative interpretations therefore remain possible (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Rather than illustrating the dysfunctional nature of abusive supervision, for example, the respective findings might reflect supervisors' abusive reactions toward perceived underperformance (Tepper et al., 2011). In other words, the existing evidence cannot rule out the possibility that abusive supervision might indeed have instrumental effects on subordinates' subsequent, objective performance outcomes—for example, by serving as a form of coercive influence that enforces subordinates' compliance and effort (Ferris et al., 2007).

On the basis of the previous arguments related to social exchange theory as well as subordinate resource depletion (Harris et al., 2007; Duffy et al., 2002), we concur with prior research that has cast abusive supervision as destructive rather than instrumental (e.g., Krasikova et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007). Thus, we expect abusive supervision to negatively associate with a subordinate's subsequent, objective performance. To corroborate this prediction, however, direct empirical evidence is urgently needed. Hence, we examined the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Abusive supervision is negatively related with a subordinate's subsequent objective work performance.

Conditional Mediating Role of Abusive Supervision

Taken together, the foregoing considerations point toward a rather complex picture of the overall relationship between subordinate performance and abusive supervision. On the one hand, as suggested in Hypotheses 1 and 2, both outcome dependence and interpersonal liking may moderate the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision. On the other hand, as suggested in Hypothesis 3, abusive supervision should negatively associate with a subordinate's subsequent, objective work performance. All in all, we therefore propose a pattern of conditional indirect effects (cf. Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007), such that (a) abusive supervision mediates the association between subordinates' perceived and objective work performance and (b) the strength of this indirect linkage hinges on supervisors' outcome dependence and liking (see Figure 1).⁵

Specifically, Hypothesis 1 argued (and Study 1 showed) that higher (lower) outcome dependence may render perceived performance more (less) relevant for supervisors' abusive behavior. As a consequence, we would expect a pronounced, indirect linkage between perceived and objective subordinate performance, as mediated by abusive supervision, under conditions of higher outcome dependence. In this situation, a somewhat ironic, counterproductive pattern of associations may emerge, such that perceptions of inferior performance may lead supervisors "to treat the individual accordingly as a poor performer, thereby sustaining the underachievement" (Eden, 1992, p. 297). Under conditions of lower outcome dependence, in contrast, Study 1 showed a weaker linkage between perceived performance and supervisor abuse. We therefore expect lower outcome dependence to buffer the indirect association between perceived and objective subordinate performance, through abusive supervision.

Hypothesis 4a: Supervisors' outcome dependence moderates the indirect effect of supervisor perceptions of subordinate performance on subordinates' subsequent objective performance, as mediated by abusive supervision. This indirect effect is stronger under conditions of higher rather than lower outcome dependence.

⁵ We did not find liking to moderate the perceived performance–abusive supervision linkage in Study 1. As such, one may question the potential moderating role of liking in the indirect effect between perceived and objective performance (through abusive supervision) as well. As outlined earlier, however, we cannot rule out the possibility that the nonsignificant findings for Hypothesis 2 in Study 1 were attributable to specific characteristics of our sample and study design. Hence, it appeared necessary to further examine liking as a possible moderator in Study 2.

Moreover, Hypothesis 2 argued that lower (higher) interpersonal liking may strengthen (weaken) the role of perceived subordinate performance for abusive supervision. Logically, then, one would also expect the indirect effect of perceived performance on objective subordinate performance (through abusive supervision) to be stronger among disliked subordinates. Again, a dysfunctional pattern of associations may therefore emerge in this situation, with perceptions of inferior performance triggering abusive supervisory behavior that, in turn, diminishes subordinates' objective performance and deprives them of improvement opportunities. In contrast, as higher liking potentially decouples perceived performance from abusive supervision, this dysfunctional pattern may be dampened among well-liked subordinates. Consequently, we anticipate higher liking to buffer the indirect effect between subordinates' perceived and objective performance, through abusive supervision.

Hypothesis 4b: Supervisors' liking moderates the indirect effect of supervisor perceptions of subordinate performance on subordinates' subsequent objective performance, as mediated by abusive supervision. This indirect effect is stronger under conditions of lower rather than higher liking.

Study 2: Method, Results, and Discussion

Sample and Data Collection

Study 2 used a time-lagged field design to examine the full set of relationships proposed in this research. We collected the data for this study in a large garment manufacturing firm located in China. Targeted participants were manufacturing workers (viz., subordinates) and their direct supervisors. Subordinates were responsible for assembling lifestyle apparel, and supervisors' responsibilities included scheduling and organizing subordinates' work, providing support with task-related problems, and monitoring subordinate performance. Although all subordinates performed similar jobs, company representatives indicated that supervisors' outcome dependence on individual subordinates might differ markedly, for example due to individual differences in subordinates' technical abilities, work experiences, and informal influence in their teams.

Subordinates and supervisors attended separate sessions in which we collected data using paper-and-pencil surveys. We created two distinct survey versions to assist in minimizing common method variance concerns (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The employee survey captured abusive supervision, whereas the supervisor survey assessed each direct subordinate's perceived performance as well as supervisors' outcome dependence and liking with regard to each individual subordinate. Both survey versions were translated into Chinese using a double-blind back-translation procedure. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality assured; also, subordinates and supervisors completed their surveys at separate locations, and participants returned completed surveys directly to the researchers at the end of their survey session. Finally, we obtained objective data on individual subordinates' work performance from company records roughly 1 month after the surveys had been conducted.

Complete and usable data were available for 169 supervisor-subordinate dyads (of 293 dyads initially targeted), yielding an overall response rate of 58%. Fifty-seven percent of the participating subordinates were female, and 43% were male. Their av-

erage age was 24 years ($SD = 5.59$), average organizational tenure was 1.81 years ($SD = 2.21$), and average tenure with the current supervisor was 9.30 months ($SD = 10.17$). Each supervisor rated, on average, 11 of these subordinates ($SD = 4.98$); supervisors were primarily male (70%), with an average age of 31 years ($SD = 8.55$) and organizational tenure of 3.43 years ($SD = 2.71$).⁶

Measures

Perceived subordinate performance. We asked supervisors to consecutively assess each of their direct subordinates' job performance using Conger, Kanungo, and Menon's (2000) five-item measure. Sample items include "This employee has high work performance" and "This employee accomplishes most of his or her tasks quickly and efficiently" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha was .79.

Outcome dependence. We adapted De Jong, Van der Vegt, and Molleman's (2007) task dependence measure to capture supervisors' outcome dependence with respect to each of their direct subordinates. Consecutively referring to each individual subordinate, we asked supervisors, "How dependent are you on this employee to achieve your work goals?" (1 = *not dependent*, 7 = *fully dependent*).

Interpersonal liking. To capture supervisors' liking of their individual subordinates, we used one item from Brown and Keeping (2005). Consecutively referring to each subordinate, supervisors indicated their agreement with the statement "I get along well with this employee" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).⁷

Abusive supervision. Subordinates completed Tepper's (2000) 15-item measure of abusive supervision. Sample items include "My supervisor puts me down in front of others" and "My supervisor is rude to me." Subordinates rated each of these behaviors on a response scale ranging from 1 (*I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me*) to 5 (*He or she uses this behavior very often with me*). Cronbach's alpha was .81.

Objective subordinate performance. The company used a piece-rate pay system through which subordinates' monthly salary was based on the quantity of their production output. Specifically, supervisors monitored the number of products assembled by each of their subordinates and recorded the respective information in a standardized form on a daily basis. To verify the correctness of this information, subordinates were required to sign the respective form every day, and the company conducted regular checks using a team of independent work inspectors. We obtained this performance information for each subordinate from company records for

⁶ We note that 34 of the subordinates in our sample were included for supplementary analyses in a previous study (Xu, Huang, Lam, & Miao, 2012). This earlier study, however, did not incorporate information on prior objective performance, perceived performance, outcome dependence, and liking, which are central to the present article.

⁷ We acknowledge that our use of single-item measures for outcome dependence and liking could be regarded as a limitation. It is important to note, however, that previous research has effectively used single-item measures to capture a wide range of constructs (e.g., Shamir & Kark, 2004; Vashdi, Bamberger, & Erez, 2013; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Consistent with other work requiring participants to rate their dependence or liking with regard to multiple other individuals (e.g., De Jong et al., 2007; Grutterink, Van der Vegt, Molleman, & Jehn, 2013; Heine & Renshaw, 2002), we chose this approach to ameliorate survey fatigue. The Appendix presents additional validity evidence for the respective measures.

the month after we had conducted the surveys, indicating subordinates' average daily productivity for the respective month.

Control variables. Researchers have noted that leader–follower relations may change over time (Shamir, 2011), and meta-analytic evidence indicates relatively small but consistent relationships between individuals' gender and age and their likelihood of becoming a victim of abusive behavior at work (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Hence, we controlled for subordinates' tenure with their current supervisor (in months) as well as subordinates' gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and age (in years) when testing Hypotheses 1 and 2. Moreover, we used two different analyses when examining Hypotheses 3 and 4. Consistent with previous research on abusive supervision and different dimensions of subjective subordinate performance (e.g., Harris et al., 2007, 2011; Zellars et al., 2002), we first examined the simple relationship between abusive supervision and individual subordinates' subsequent objective work performance. In a second step, we incorporated subordinates' previous objective performance (i.e., for the month prior to survey administration) in these analyses to account for existing individual-level differences (cf. Detert et al., 2007; Lian et al., 2014). This additional covariate was measured in the same way as described for subordinates' subsequent objective performance.⁸

Data Analysis

The present data have a nested structure (i.e., multiple subordinates report to the same supervisor), thus violating the assumption of independent observations (Bickel, 2007). We therefore used multilevel methods for hypothesis testing. Specifically, we used random intercept models to test Hypotheses 1–3 at the individual subordinates' level of analysis (Level 1) while taking into account possible supervisor level (Level 2) effects. These analyses produce estimates comparable to unstandardized regression coefficients, and the chi-square difference between two subsequent models indicates change in model fit. Further, we computed proportions of incremental explained variance (ΔR^2 ; Bickel, 2007), which are comparable to the ΔR^2 statistics obtained in ordinary regression analysis. All independent variables were standardized prior to the analyses (Aiken & West, 1991).

We built on the procedures outlined by Krull and MacKinnon (2001) to test the mediated moderation models described in Hypotheses 4a and 4b. First, we derived simple slopes of the relation between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision at higher (+1 standard deviation) and lower (–1 standard deviation) values of outcome dependence and liking, respectively, and we drew on the relationship between abusive supervision and subsequent objective subordinate performance obtained from testing Hypothesis 3. Then, we used these estimates to derive percentile confidence intervals (CIs) for the population values of the conditional indirect effects of perceived on objective subordinate performance, through abusive supervision, at higher and lower levels of the moderator variables, using Selig and Preacher's (2008) Monte Carlo method (for similar approaches, see Lorinkova, Pearsall, & Sims, 2013; Zhou, Wang, Chen, & Shi, 2012). The use of such confidence intervals is considered superior to traditional methods (e.g., the Sobel [1982] test) in examining (conditional) indirect effects, because it ameliorates power problems introduced by nonnormal

sampling distributions of an indirect effect (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004).

Results of Study 2

Table 2 depicts descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all study variables. In line with expectations, abusive supervision and subsequent objective subordinate performance were negatively related ($r = -.20, p < .01$). Further, Table 3 depicts the results of the formal tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2. On the basis of Hypothesis 1, we expected outcome dependence to moderate the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision. As shown, the cross-product of perceived performance and outcome dependence was negatively associated with abusive supervision ($B = -0.08, SE = .04, p < .05$) after considering control variables and main effects. The form of this interaction (Aiken & West, 1991) is illustrated in Figure 3. Consistent with our predictions, the simple slope of the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision was significant and negative under conditions of higher outcome dependence ($B = -0.15, SE = 0.05, p < .01$), whereas the simple slope was nonsignificant under conditions of lower outcome dependence ($B = 0.02, SE = 0.06, ns$). Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted interpersonal liking to moderate the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision. As Table 3 shows, however, the respective interaction term was not significantly different from zero ($B = -0.03, SE = 0.04, ns$). Hence, Hypothesis 2 was rejected. As in Study 1, we also explored a possible three-way interaction; none of the additional interaction coefficients reached statistical significance, however, whereas the Perceived Performance $\times$ Outcome Dependence interaction remained significant in this expanded model.

Hypothesis 3 predicted abusive supervision to negatively associate with subsequent objective subordinate performance. As indicated before, there was a negative bivariate correlation between these constructs. As Table 4 (Model 1) shows, this negative relationship remained significant in a multilevel model ($B = -2.51, p < .05$), controlling for the demographic study covariates as well as perceived subordinate performance, outcome dependence, liking, and the respective interaction terms. When incorporating subordinates' previous objective work performance as an additional control variable (see Table 4, Model 2), the negative relationship became marginally significant ($B = -1.48, p = .10$). Hence, our results yielded only partial support for Hypothesis 3.

⁸ Following Tepper et al. (2011), we also explored surface demographic diversity as a potential control. Substantive results remained virtually unchanged when controlling for gender and age differences between supervisors and subordinates. Moreover, we conducted an additional set of analyses that included previous objective subordinate performance as a control variable when examining Hypotheses 1 and 2. Again, this additional covariate left our substantive study results virtually unaffected, and prior objective performance was not significantly related with abusive supervision in these analyses. Finally, we also examined the interactions predicted in Hypotheses 1 and 2 on the basis of subordinates' prior objective (rather than perceived) performance. These alternative interaction terms were not statistically significant, however. Details on these additional findings are available from the first author (Frank Walter).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 2)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>								
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Perceived performance	3.75	0.67	—								
2. Outcome dependence	4.70	1.57	.37***	—							
3. Liking	4.04	0.79	.33***	.30***	—						
4. Abusive supervision	1.67	0.45	-.10	-.08	.09	—					
5. Objective performance (postsurvey)	106.13	14.61	.29***	.13 [†]	.12	-.20**	—				
6. Tenure with supervisor	9.33	10.16	.13	.05	-.04	-.02	.08	—			
7. Employee gender	0.57	0.50	.03	-.01	-.08	-.01	-.09	-.05	—		
8. Employee age	23.79	5.59	-.08	-.03	-.03	-.08	.11	.25**	-.12	—	
9. Objective performance (presurvey)	93.89	10.57	.34***	.23**	.18*	-.17*	.63***	.15*	-.09	.14 [†]	—

[†] $p \leq .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 4a predicted supervisors' outcome dependence to moderate the indirect effect of perceived subordinate performance on subsequent objective performance, as transmitted by abusive supervision. As for Hypothesis 3, we first examined this notion without controlling for prior objective performance. Consistent with Hypothesis 4a, perceived and subsequent objective performance were positively and indirectly related (through abusive supervision) under conditions higher outcome dependence (+1 standard deviation; indirect effect = .38, 95% CI = .04, .86), whereas the indirect effect was nonsignificant under conditions of lower outcome dependence (-1 standard deviation; indirect effect = -.05, 95% CI = -.41, .27). When controlling for prior objective performance in the abusive supervision-subsequent performance linkage, however, confidence intervals for the indirect effects included zero under both conditions (see Table 5), although the indirect effect remained substantially more pronounced under conditions of higher (indirect effect = .22) rather than lower outcome dependence (indirect effect = -.03). Mirroring Hypothesis 3, we therefore conclude that Hypothesis 4a received only partial support.

Finally, Hypothesis 4b predicted interpersonal liking to moderate the indirect effect of perceived on subsequent objective performance, through abusive supervision. Given that liking did not moderate the perceived performance-abusive supervision linkage (i.e., Hypothesis 2), this pattern of mediated moderation appeared unlikely. In fact, as shown in Table 5, confidence intervals for the

conditional indirect effects included zero at both higher and lower values of liking, independent of whether we controlled for prior objective performance. Hence, Hypothesis 4b was rejected.

Discussion of Study 2 Findings

Corroborating Hypothesis 1, we found supervisors' outcome dependence to moderate the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision. In contrast, the moderating role of supervisors' interpersonal liking postulated in Hypothesis 2 was rejected. These results constructively replicated Study 1's findings. Specifically, Study 2 moved from a hypothetical scenario design toward an organizational research setting, captured outcome dependence as a dyadic phenomenon, and examined Hypotheses 1 and 2 in a different cultural context (viz., China vs. the Netherlands). The Chinese culture is characterized by considerably higher collectivism and power distance than the Dutch one (Hofstede, 2001). Hence, one might expect individuals from these countries to exhibit distinct attitudes toward abusive supervision (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012). These differences notwithstanding, Studies 1 and 2 yielded very similar results, providing greater confidence in the robustness and generalizability of the respective findings (cf. Eden, 2002; Sitkin, 2007).

Table 3
Random Coefficient Results for Abusive Supervision (Study 2)

Predictor	Estimate	<i>SE</i>
Tenure with supervisor	-0.00	0.04
Employee gender	-0.03	0.03
Employee age	-0.04	0.04
Perceived performance	-0.06	0.04
Outcome dependence	-0.07	0.04
Liking	0.07 [†]	0.04
Perceived Performance × Outcome Dependence	-0.08*	0.04
Perceived Performance × Liking	-0.03	0.04
$\Delta\chi^2$ (from adding interaction terms)	9.59***	
ΔR^2 (from adding interaction terms)	.03	

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are shown.

[†] $p \leq .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 3. Interactive relationship of perceived subordinate performance and outcome dependence with abusive supervision in Study 2.

Table 4
Random Coefficient Results for Subsequent Objective Subordinate Performance (Study 2)

Predictor	Model 1		Model 2	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Step 1				
Tenure with supervisor	0.07	1.15	−0.20	0.94
Employee gender	−1.33	1.04	−0.45	0.85
Employee age	1.21	1.08	0.64	0.88
Perceived performance (PP)	4.00**	1.26	1.14	1.08
Outcome dependence (OD)	0.10	1.38	−0.60	1.12
Liking (L)	2.19†	1.20	0.32	1.01
Objective performance (presurvey)			8.71***	0.97
PP × OD	−0.24	1.09	−0.40	0.89
PP × L	−0.30	1.08	−0.34	0.88
Abusive supervision	−2.51*	1.09	−1.48†	1.04
$\Delta\chi^2$ (from adding abusive supervision)	5.62*		2.91*	
ΔR^2 (from adding abusive supervision)	.04		.02	

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are shown.

† $p \leq .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

In addition, Study 2 offered unique evidence regarding Hypotheses 3 and 4. Notably, these findings were more complex than we had expected. Abusive supervision was negatively associated with a subordinate's subsequent objective performance and served as a conditional mediator between perceived and objective performance—in situations of higher outcome dependence—when we did not control for subordinates' prior performance levels. Despite marginally significant trends in the same direction, however, these associations did not reach conventional significance standards when incorporating prior objective performance as a covariate. Moreover, liking did not moderate the indirect effect of perceived performance on objective performance, through abusive supervision.

When considering these results for the performance consequences of abusive supervision, it is important to note that the subordinates in our sample performed highly standardized, routinized, and repetitive tasks. As the correlation between pre- and postsurvey objective performance shows ($r = .63$, $p < .001$; see Table 2), pronounced intraindividual performance variations were therefore unlikely. Hence, it may be fruitful to further examine the

role of abusive supervision for objective subordinate performance in contexts that allow for greater subordinate discretion and, thus, higher variability (e.g., knowledge or project work). Also, it may be worthwhile to explore longer time lags between abusive supervision and subsequent objective performance in future research. Given our study participants' routinized task characteristics, we expected performance effects within the chosen, relatively short time frame (1 month). Scholars have noted, however, that there is no theoretical rationale to indicate how much time is required for such effects to emerge (Lian et al., 2014), and research has illustrated relations over 6 months between abusive supervision and subordinates' turnover (Tepper, 2000) and organizational deviance (Lian et al., 2014).

General Discussion

The present findings make several important contributions to the literature on abusive supervision, highlighting and clarifying the role of instrumentality considerations in this regard. First of all, our results provide new knowledge on the origins of supervisors' abusive acts. Despite strong theoretical reasons to assume that perceived subordinate performance may shape supervisors' behavior (e.g., Ferris et al., 2007; Kräkel, 1997; Tepper, 2007), we are aware of only one study that has empirically investigated this notion (Tepper et al., 2011). Hence, the present research corroborates the potential relevance of supervisory performance perceptions and extends previous work in critical ways. Across two independent studies, we showed that supervisors' performance perceptions are especially likely to negatively relate with their abusive behavior if a supervisor's outcomes depend on a subordinate to a relatively large extent. With lower outcome dependence, in contrast, even subordinates perceived as high performers may find it difficult to evade supervisor abuse.

Although these findings may seem counterintuitive, we note that they are fully consistent with predictions derived from moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990). Under conditions of lower outcome dependence, even high-performing subordinates are less likely to make a salient contribution to their supervisor's personal goal attainment. Consequently, subordinates should exhibit limited

Table 5
Conditional Indirect Effects of Perceived Performance on Objective Performance, Through Abusive Supervision (Study 2)

Moderator	Model 1		Model 2	
	Indirect effect	95% CI	Indirect effect	95% CI
Outcome dependence				
−1 SD	−.05	[−.41, .27]	−.03	[−.28, .19]
+1 SD	.38	[.04, .86]	.22	[−.08, .63]
Liking				
−1 SD	.07	[−.18, .39]	.04	[−.13, .27]
+1 SD	.23	[−.07, .68]	.13	[−.08, .48]

Note. Model 2 controls for prior objective performance in the abusive supervision–subsequent objective performance linkage (besides the other control variables); Model 1 does not include this additional covariate. CI = confidence interval (based on Selig & Preacher, 2008, using 20,000 Monte Carlo iterations).

utility for their supervisor and, thus, remain outside the supervisor's scope of justice (Hafer & Olson, 2003). In line with the present results, moral exclusion theory would suggest that those subordinates are at higher risk of becoming victims of abusive behavior (Tepper et al., 2011). Hence, our results shed new light on the development of abusive supervision, illustrating how the role of perceived subordinate performance is contingent on outcome dependence as a key contextual boundary condition.

Importantly, we believe these findings debunk a common argument that supervisors may use to justify their abusive acts—namely, that such behavior is used in an instrumental attempt to stimulate performance improvements among underachievers (cf. Ferris et al., 2007; Kräkel, 1997). As shown, perceived high-performing subordinates suffered from abusive supervision at about the same frequency as their low-performing counterparts under conditions of lower outcome dependence. Consistent with workplace victimization research that has emphasized lower level employees' precarious position (Aquino, 2000; Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001), our results therefore show that adequate performance, by itself, is not sufficient to effectively protect a subordinate from abusive supervisory acts. From an organizational perspective, it is difficult to justify supervisor abuse toward these high-performing employees, even if one were to subscribe to potential instrumentality arguments.

Contrary to our predictions, neither of the present studies found supervisors' liking to moderate the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision. Moreover, Study 2 did not find liking to moderate the indirect effect of perceived performance on subsequent objective performance, as transferred by abusive supervision. Drawing on moral exclusion research (Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Singer, 1998), we argued that liking may create a sense of moral obligation that reduces supervisors' tendency to abuse perceived low performers. One tentative explanation for the absence of this interaction effect is that it may have been dampened by the pronounced power differentials commonly encountered between supervisors and subordinates. Research has shown that powerful individuals have a strong tendency toward objectifying and evaluating others in terms of their utility for the powerful individuals' own goals (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). As such, the capacity of affective, interpersonal aspects to counteract utility considerations may have been less pronounced than we had expected (see also Huang, Wright, Chiu, & Wang, 2008). More research is needed to better understand the role of interpersonal liking with regard to abusive supervision. Such work may, for example, capture supervisors' subjective sense of power (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006) to examine the post hoc rationale outlined here.

In addition, the present investigation examined whether instrumentality considerations for abusive supervision rest on a factual basis. In doing so, our research is among the first to examine subordinates' subsequent objective performance as an outcome variable (cf. Schyns & Schilling, 2013). As noted earlier, these results are relatively complex. Without controlling for prior objective performance, our findings reiterate the dysfunctional nature of abusive supervision, illustrating an ironic pattern: By lashing out toward perceived low performers under conditions of higher outcome dependence, supervisors may undermine objective performance among the very subordinates they themselves could benefit most from. When controlling for prior objective performance,

however, our findings are more ambiguous, because the negative linkage between abusive supervision and subsequent performance becomes marginally significant. Hence, the present results do not support strong claims regarding abusive supervision's performance ramifications. At the same time, they do not provide evidence for abusive supervision's potential performance benefits either, as arguments for the instrumentality of such behavior would suggest (cf. Ferris et al., 2007; Tepper, 2007).

The present findings point toward important caveats when interpreting existing research that has illustrated abusive supervision's negative performance consequences. It has been common practice, in much of this literature, to examine cross-sectional relationships between abusive supervision and different (subjective) performance dimensions, without controlling for prior performance (e.g., Harris et al., 2007, 2011; Zellars et al., 2002). Similar to the present findings, however, the few studies that have controlled for previous performance have not observed strong and consistent effects. Lian et al. (2014), for example, found the cross-lagged relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' organizational deviance to be significant in only one of two studies. Similarly, at the business-unit level of analysis, Detert et al. (2007) found the direct linkage between abusive supervision and subsequent unit profitability to be nonsignificant when controlling for prior profitability. Hence, more research is urgently needed to examine whether previous conclusions on abusive supervision's detrimental performance implications remain valid when controlling for prior performance levels.

Practical Implications

The present research does not support arguments regarding abusive supervision's potential instrumentality (cf. Ferris et al., 2007; Kräkel, 1997). Rather, our findings yielded a negative association between abusive supervision and subsequent objective subordinate performance—although this linkage was nonsignificant once subordinates' previous performance levels were taken into account. In other words, abusive supervision is unlikely, at best, to provide tangible performance benefits and may, at worst, damage subordinates' performance outcomes. In addition, it is important to recall that existing research has frequently demonstrated harmful *personal* consequences of supervisor abuse (e.g., subordinates' depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion; Tepper, 2000, 2007). It is clear, therefore, that organizations should strive to minimize occurrences of abusive supervision.

On the basis of the rationale and findings of the present investigation, we believe three related steps may be helpful in this regard. First, our results show that higher perceptions of subordinate performance can markedly reduce abusive supervision if supervisors depend on their subordinates' contributions to a larger extent. Hence, organizations could actively promote supervisors' outcome dependence on subordinates. They may, for example, emphasize common goals and shared tasks between supervisors and subordinates (Tjosvold, 1989). Moreover, performance-based reward systems should not solely draw on supervisors' own outcomes but should take subordinates' performance inputs into account when evaluating supervisors (Tjosvold, 1985; Turban et al., 1990). In this way, organizations may prevent high-performing subordinates, in particular, from becoming victims of abusive

supervision, although it is important to note that perceived low performers are unlikely to benefit from such measures.

Hence, a second step toward more comprehensively reducing instances of abusive supervision may be to systematically educate supervisors about its negative consequences and to counteract possible misconceptions about the potential instrumentality of such behavior (cf. Krasikova et al., 2013). Clear-cut information about the dysfunctional nature of abusive supervision (cf. *Tepper, 2000, 2007*) seems critical in this respect. This may be an important element, for example, within formal leadership development programs designed to prevent or reduce supervisors' unfair, uncivil, and abusive behavior (for specific training and intervention possibilities in this regard, see *Leiter, Laschinger, Day, & Oore, 2011; Skarlicki & Latham, 2005*).

Finally, we believe organizational sanctions represent an important third step. It may be difficult, in many instances, to create strong outcome dependence between supervisors and all of their subordinates, and a purely educative approach may not suffice in all cases. Hence, in addition to these measures, organizations should implement clear-cut policies and rigid sanctions, possibly as part of a zero-tolerance policy against supervisor abuse (cf. *Sutton, 2007*). Previous research has shown that such sanctions can diminish subordinate-targeted aggression (*Inness, LeBlanc, & Barling, 2008*) and, thus, may effectively protect employees from abusive supervision.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

A key strength of the present investigation is its constructive replication of the results for Hypotheses 1 and 2 across two independent studies, using widely differing research designs, samples, and study contexts. As such, we were able to counterbalance many potential limitations of either study. In particular, the interactive relationship of perceived subordinate performance and outcome dependence with abusive supervision was observed across both an experimental scenario and a field setting. Hence, this research is the first to provide causal evidence for the role of perceived performance as an antecedent of abusive supervision while, at the same time, illustrating the generalizability of the respective findings to an actual organizational context. We therefore believe some confidence in the validity of the respective associations is warranted.

That said, a few inconsistencies between the individual studies' results deserve mention. Both perceived subordinate performance and interpersonal liking had a main effect on abusive supervision in Study 1, whereas the respective coefficients were not significant in Study 2. Notably, the independent variables were manipulated in the first study, with the scenario unambiguously describing the hypothetical subordinate as either a clear over- or underperformer and as either very likable or dislikable. In the organizational field data for Study 2, in contrast, the majority of subordinates did not fall on the extreme ends of the measurement scales (e.g., on a scale from 1 to 5, scores between 2 and 4 were attained among 79% of the subordinates for perceived performance and among 73% for liking). Thus, stronger effects were to be expected in Study 1.

Further, Hypotheses 3 and 4 (on the performance implications of abusive supervision) were only examined in the second study, using a correlational design that does not allow for causal conclu-

sions (despite a strong theoretical fundament and time lag). Future experimental or longitudinal work is needed to address this issue. Moreover, Study 2 was conducted within one specific organization and country, and the subordinates in this study were relatively young, exhibited limited tenure both with the organization and with their supervisor, and were charged with relatively routinized and repetitive tasks. Questions about generalizability therefore await further inquiry with regard to Hypotheses 3 and 4.

Our results show that future research is well-advised to include measures of prior subordinate performance when examining performance outcomes of abusive supervision, to allow for a rigorous test of the respective relations (see also *Lian et al., 2014*). Also, given the marginally significant association we observed between abusive supervision and subsequent objective performance (when controlling for prior performance), it seems worthwhile to incorporate potential mediators. *Detert et al. (2007)*, for example, found an indirect effect of abusive supervision on subsequent business unit profitability, through unit-level counterproductivity, although the direct performance effects of abusive supervision were not significant. The authors concluded that these findings were in line with arguments "that individual leader characteristics or attributes are unlikely to be significant direct predictors of distal performance outcomes . . . but instead influence these outcomes indirectly via more proximal decisions and outcomes" (p. 1002). It would be interesting, therefore, to examine more proximal subordinate states (e.g., emotional exhaustion; *Tepper, 2000*) as transferring mechanisms in the linkage between abusive supervision and subsequent objective performance.

Similarly, it would be a logical next step to examine key mechanisms theorized to underlie the relationship between perceived subordinate performance and abusive supervision (e.g., utility, moral exclusion; *Tepper et al., 2011*), contributing to a more nuanced understanding of this linkage. Moreover, the theoretical arguments used here may enable scholars to expand the range of antecedents of abusive supervision. Besides perceived performance, for example, subordinates' utility might hinge on their perceived expertise, knowledge, and skills (cf. *Van der Vegt, Bunderson, & Oosterhof, 2006*), on their specific role within the team (*Humphrey et al., 2009*), or on their contextual and counterproductive behaviors (*Lian et al., 2014*). Investigating such variables may advance a more comprehensive depiction of the origins of abusive supervision.

Given the important, moderating role of outcome dependence uncovered in our studies, it may further be interesting to extend the present findings toward alternative forms of dependency. Interdependence theory has, for instance, described task dependence as reflecting the degree to which an actor requires a target's inputs (e.g., materials, information, expertise) to accomplish his or her tasks (*Wageman, 1999*). On the basis of previous research demonstrating the role of task dependence for interpersonal interactions (e.g., *De Jong et al., 2007*), we would expect such dependency to also shape supervisors' abusive behavior. Moreover, we note that the present manipulations and measures exclusively captured patterns of positive dependency (i.e., supervisors' goal attainment being more or less contingent on a subordinates' contributions). It would be highly interesting to also investigate situations of negative outcome dependence, indicating that a supervisor's goal attainment suffers when a subordinate performs well (e.g., because a high-performing subordinate threatens the super-

visor's hierarchical position; Tjosvold, 1985). Theorists have speculated that, under such conditions, high-performing subordinates may be more likely than low-performing subordinates to become victims of supervisor abuse (Kräkel, 1997). Future research empirically examining these issues may contribute to a better, more integrative understanding of different types of supervisor-subordinate dependence relations as antecedents of abusive supervision.

Finally, we believe it is worthwhile to examine the degree to which the present findings are unique to supervisor abuse or may generalize to abuse originating from other sources (e.g., peers, subordinates). On the one hand, scholars have demonstrated differing antecedents and outcomes of workplace aggression, depending on the perpetrator or target of such behavior (Greenberg & Barling, 1999; Herscovis & Barling, 2010). On the other hand, patterns of interdependence have been shown to relate with aggressive, harmful behavior not only between supervisors and subordinates (as in the present study) but also between coworkers (Lam et al., 2011). Hence, we encourage future research to build on the present findings to investigate forms of abuse originating from alternative sources. By illustrating key differences and similarities in this regard, it may be possible to refine and expand the present argumentation and, in doing so, to move closer to a general theory of workplace abuse.

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(Appendix follows)

Appendix

Supplementary Study

To corroborate the construct validity of Study 2's measures of outcome dependence and liking, we conducted an additional survey study with 70 participants recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (54% male, 46% female, mean age = 34.8 years, $SD = 11.7$). We asked these participants to think about a person that they work with closely or with whom they have worked with closely in the past and to answer a number of items with regard to that person.

For outcome dependence, we incorporated the single-item measure used in Study 2 (cf. De Jong et al., 2007) along with a four-item measure from Janssen, Van de Vliert, and Veenstra (1999), following adaptations suggested by De Dreu (2007; sample item: "When this person excels in his or her work, I benefit from that" [Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$]). The correlation between our single-item measure and the four-item measure was .64 ($p < .001$); when combining all five items into a single scale, Cronbach's α for this overall measure was .92. Furthermore, the interpersonal liking item in Study 2 was taken from Brown and Keeping's

(2005) four-item measure. Hence, we incorporated all four of these items in the validation study (e.g., "I like this person very much"). Cronbach's α was .95 both for the full measure and for a three-item measure based on the items not included in Study 2. Moreover, the correlation between the item from Study 2 and the three-item measure was .82 ($p < .001$). Taken together, these findings provide evidence for the validity of Study 2's measures of outcome dependence and interpersonal liking. In addition, we note that Study 2 was designed to constructively replicate Study 1's results on the antecedents of abusive supervision. To the extent that Study 2's outcomes are consistent with those of Study 1, we therefore believe the viability of the present measures is further supported.

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